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Funding push on for harbor



A funding request that could bring an additional \$1.5 million to efforts aiding the rebuilding of a breakwater at the Grand Marais Harbor, above, is currently winding its way through the U.S. Senate. Locals have sought for years to secure funding to have the once deep port restored, allowing greater use of the recreational harbor. Should a breakwater be constructed, the harbor would be dredged to a suitable depth. (Journal photo by John Pepin)

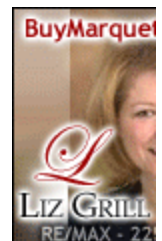
By JOHN PEPIN, Journal Munising Bureau

GRAND MARAIS — Locals in Burt Township are watching the progress of a \$1.5 million legislative funding request to help rebuild a breakwater at the Grand Marais Harbor.

The request for the money recently passed through a Senate Appropriations Committee, which included the funding for the harbor in its Energy and Water Appropriations bill for 2007.

"This committee is the biggest hurdle to overcome to gain funding," said former Burt Township Supervisor Lee Durrwachter in a statement posted on the township's Web site. "Final approval will bring Congressional support to this project to over three million dollars in the past six months."

For decades, locals have sought to replace an old breakwater that was allowed to fall into disrepair after the passing of the area's lumbering heyday.



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With the protective wall gone, the once deep harbor — which is the only such refuge for mariners between Munising and Whitefish Point — was infiltrated by drifting sands.

Depths which once accommodated large ships had now been reduced to only a few feet. Locals want to rebuild the wall and then dredge out the sand behind it, returning the depths to levels able to allow Great Lakes cruise ships and other larger watercraft to access the area.

A new breakwater would keep the harbor functioning as a recreational draw for tourists, boaters, fishermen and others. Increased harbor use and access are seen as a way to provide an economic boost to the area's tourist business.

An initial \$1.5 million toward the breakwater replacement project was approved last November when President George W. Bush signed the Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act for 2006.

That legislation funded several projects and programs of the Department of Energy, the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation, the Army Corps of Engineers, and several other agencies, and provides funds to help protect the nation's environment.

Money approved by Bush in that bill for the harbor is nearly a third of the \$6 million estimated cost to rebuild a breakwater at Grand Marais.

The current \$1.5 million funding allocation is part of a total of \$5.4 million requested. Additional sources of revenue for the project have also been explored.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officials receive the federal funding allocations for the project and the agency administers the money.

Aides for Sen. Carl Levin, D-Southfield, said the new funding request has several more hurdles to clear before making final passage, including approval by the full Senate.

Congress recesses in August until September. It is unknown whether the legislation package would come up for a possible vote before that time.

"I have no idea when it would come to a vote on the Senate floor, depending on a range of scenarios," said Amy Berglund, Upper Peninsula representative for Levin in Escanaba.

In addition to Levin, township officials say several lawmakers have helped work on the harbor funding issue on the federal and state levels including U.S. Sen Debbie Stabenow, D-Lansing, U.S. Rep. Bart Stupak, D-Menominee, state Sen. Mike Prusi, D-Ishpeming, state Rep. Steve Adamini, D-Marquette and Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

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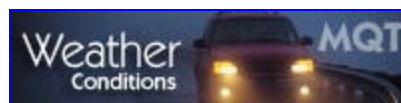


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